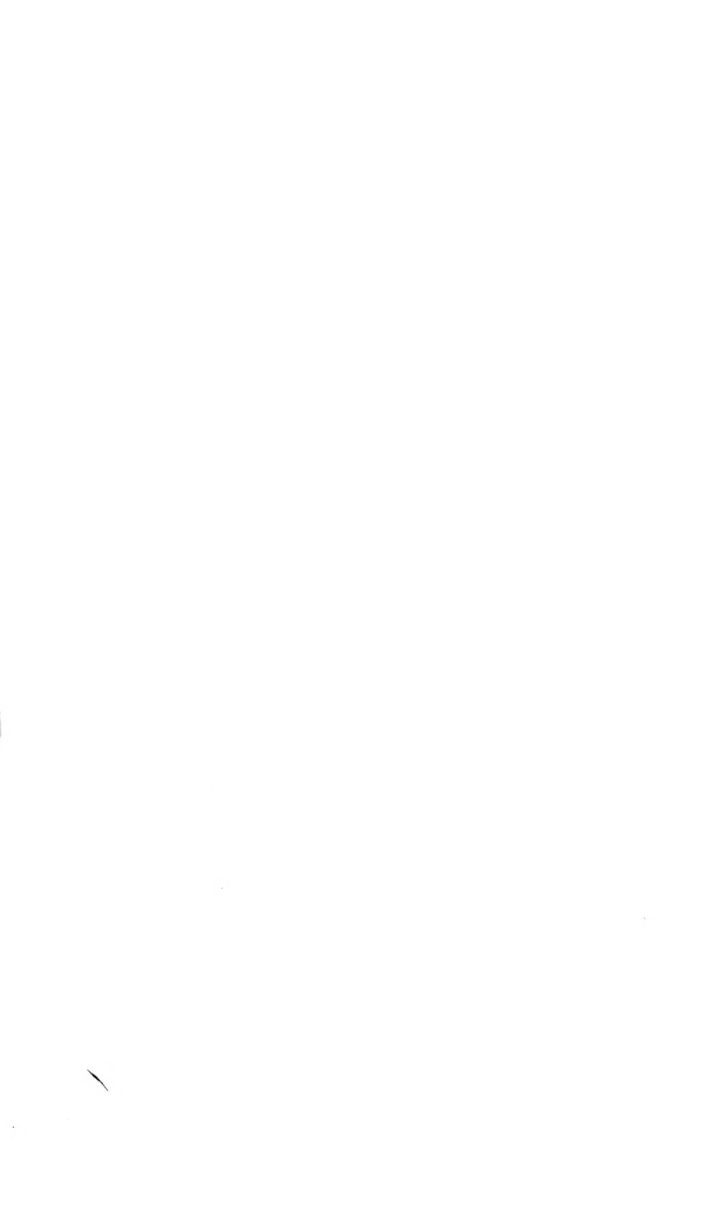


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8.

Mentone folk love

to go to the sea

Amsterdam Amsterdam

get better.

Ref. Mr. Andrews at the
at the house at the Bay.

An American gentleman

who has lived long in

the West Indies - and has

many friends at the house

subjects of language &

history -

STORIES FROM MENTONE.



HEARD these stories in the Spring of 1879 from an elderly native woman who has always lived in Mentone. She told them almost wholly in the local dialect, her usual speech, and her knowledge of French or Italian

being very small. On returning to my house I wrote them at the time just as she gave them, as nearly as I could remember, but turning some of them into English and some into French.

Witchcraft

THE CHARCOAL BURNERS.

There were two poor charcoal burners who lived in the same cabin up in the hills, and they carried their charcoal to the neighbouring town for sale. One day, it being the eve of the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, who was the patron saint of one of them, Baptiste told his companion that he would not work the next morning until he had done his duty in hearing mass. The other, finding him asleep at the usual hour for rising, and remembering what he had said, went off and left him. Baptiste soon arose, attended mass, and went to town with his load, meeting his friend, already well on his way home. It was nightfall before he himself started to return. With the darkness there arose so violent a storm that he was forced to seek refuge in the hollow trunk of a walnut tree.* Presently he heard the sound of voices, and he found that a party of witches were drawing near, among whom was the devil himself. In great fear and haste he scrambled up the tree as high as he could, and hid himself to the utmost among

* The walnut tree is believed at Mentone to be the witches' tree, and unsafe to sleep under.

the leaves. The witches stopped under the tree, where they had evidently come for a Sabbat. They began by telling one another of the deviltries each had done since last they met, how one had caused a man to die, how another had in mischief overthrown a fine olive-tree. But suddenly a witch cried out, "I surely smell a Christian, there must be one near by." They then looked in the hole, and all over the neighbourhood, but found no one. They finally concluded that doubtless some one had lately been in the hole, and had gone on his way. Soon another cried out, "But where is Ranghetta?" Ranghetta, as her name shows, was a cripple, and she was the most cunning and wicked of them all. After a while she came and excused her lateness, for the reason that she had been very busy. All were eager to hear her story, and she was about to tell them when she, too, was startled by the same smell. After having been quieted in the same way she let them know how she had just bewitched the king's only son. "I have sucked all the marrow from out his bones; he has wasted away to a skeleton, and to-morrow he will die. The marrow I put in an earthen jar, which I hid safely under the staircase in the stable, and the only cure is to rub the marrow over him, but no one can possibly find it." Baptiste heard all, and was lucky enough not to be seen. He watched the witches dance, and towards dawn they went, and he was able to come down. He sped at once in all haste to the town, found the jar of marrow, and hurried with it to the palace, where he asked to be allowed to speak with the king. The lady who came to the door, seeing an ill-clad man, black with coal, bade him begone, for they could not look after beggars when every one in the palace was busy about the dying prince. He told her that he would cure him, and was so earnest that she at last went to the king. "Never mind his ill-looks," said the king, "the best doctors in my kingdom have given the boy up, so there can be no harm in trying this man." He was then led into a great room, where thirty or forty doctors were assembled, and where lay the sick boy. He rubbed the marrow over his wasted body, and very soon he who was at his last gasp began to revive, spoke, and declared himself much better. In a few days he was out of danger. The king, filled with joy and gratitude,

said to the coal-burner, "As I have but one son I adopt you for my second." So he caused him to be dressed in fine clothes, gave him a room in the palace, and made him his companion. One day riding in the country Baptiste met his former associate, and, not at all spoiled by his sudden good fortune, he greeted him cordially, without, however, being recognised until after he had told him who he was. The other was anxious to learn how he had been so fortunate, but Baptiste, unwilling to keep the king waiting, agreed to tell him the next day at the palace. The coal-burner came and heard, and went home filled with envy, and secretly determined to try his luck too at the walnut tree. Accordingly, one night he climbed up into it, and soon the witches appeared. But unfortunately he was not, like Baptiste, a pious man, nor had he been to mass that day, nor many a day before. The witches soon noticed the Christian smell, and, hunting about, found the poor man. They called him down, but he would not come; in a moment they overthrew the tree, clutched the unhappy wretch, and tossed him about until he was dead.

Story of the Walnut Tree is told in the story of the King's Son who was taken to the sea-side and there fell asleep. He was awoken by the sound of voices, and he saw that a party of seven witches were about to enter the boat. He hid under the bow, and the witches having seated themselves within began to sing: "Row for six, row for seven." "But the boat does not move," cried they. "There must be more than seven of us," said one. Said another, "Perhaps one is with child." "Row for eight or row for ten," then cried they all, and off went the boat. The next morning the young man found himself at Milan in a great public square, and watched by bull-dogs. He was taken back to Mentone in the same strange manner, and on the way he managed to cut a bit from the skirt of one of the witches without being seen. The day after his return on meeting his sweetheart he


THE STRANGE JOURNEY.

"A friend of my parents who lived in Mentone had a sweetheart who was a witch. One hot summer night when cooling himself by the sea-side he lay down in a boat and there fell asleep. He was awoke by the sound of voices, and he saw that a party of seven witches were about to enter the boat. He hid under the bow, and the witches having seated themselves within began to sing: "Row for six, row for seven." "But the boat does not move," cried they. "There must be more than seven of us," said one. Said another, "Perhaps one is with child." "Row for eight or row for ten," then cried they all, and off went the boat. The next morning the young man found himself at Milan in a great public square, and watched by bull-dogs. He was taken back to Mentone in the same strange manner, and on the way he managed to cut a bit from the skirt of one of the witches without being seen. The day after his return on meeting his sweetheart he


This witch story is well known in Mentone. I have known the go to the sea-side. The story is of a young man who was taken to the sea-side and there fell asleep. He was awoken by the sound of voices, and he saw that a party of seven witches were about to enter the boat. He hid under the bow, and the witches having seated themselves within began to sing: "Row for six, row for seven." "But the boat does not move," cried they. "There must be more than seven of us," said one. Said another, "Perhaps one is with child." "Row for eight or row for ten," then cried they all, and off went the boat. The next morning the young man found himself at Milan in a great public square, and watched by bull-dogs. He was taken back to Mentone in the same strange manner, and on the way he managed to cut a bit from the skirt of one of the witches without being seen. The day after his return on meeting his sweetheart he

saw that her skirt wanted this very piece, and to her great alarm he gave it back to her. She charged him to tell no one of his adventure, under threat of great misfortune, and to ensure his secrecy she loaded him with money and other presents so that he became very rich."*

THE BEWITCHED MILL.

There was once a poor but industrious miller, and he kept his mill at work night and day in order to make both ends meet. At last came a time when a witch made up her mind to ruin him. She would manage without being seen to dip her hands in a pot of oil and then grease the wheels so that they could not turn. This she used to do when he was napping. When he was awake she would take the shape of a beautiful little red dog and fawn upon him, so that he became very fond of her and allowed her to stay at the mill. He racked his brains uselessly to find out what was wrong, and was slowly ruining himself in paying the millwrights who were always there trying to make the mill run. At last he bethought himself that there might be foul play at night during his sleep, so he determined to watch. That evening he settled himself as if for his nap, and the little dog placed herself as usual by his side waiting for his sleeping to be at mischief. He presently feigned to snore, and she, misled, stole off noiselessly to the machinery and stopped it. The miller darted quickly forward and caught her by the neck. She begged hard to be let go, or at least that the miller would change one hand for the other under the pretence of easing her pain, believing that this movement would give her a chance to escape. But the miller refused, saying, "I stir not hand nor foot till thou tell'st who thou art," and he held her tightly with the same hand until the morning angelus, when he found that he was holding a woman by the long hair of her head. "Yes," she confessed, "I am a witch who has come all the way from the Indies to torment you." 

* This story is imperfect apparently, but thus it was told.

 There is not much in this and thus -
little (unclear)

THE LITTLE MARE.

A peasant had a young son. The child's mother being about to die called him to her, and charged him solemnly to take good care of a little mare she owned, saying that by doing so he would be richly rewarded. The boy promised; his mother soon died, and in a very short time his father took another wife. His stepmother, not loving him, wickedly persuaded her husband to allow her to make away with him. One day she made for him some poisoned fritters. He had not lately given much care to his promise, but luckily he bethought himself of it that day, and the mare, after chiding him, told him how it was better late than never on account of his great danger. Thus warned he went home, where the stepmother fondled him more than usual; but, saying he was ill, he only ate a bit of dry bread. It happened the same with some cake that she cooked for him a few days after: unfortunately, however, this time the mare was overheard warning him. Resolving then to kill the mare also, she called her doctor, who wickedly consented to aid her. They agreed that she should feign illness, and that he should then advise, as the only cure, that she should wrap her body in the skin of a mare just killed. The mare, who knew everything, told the boy of it, and said that, to avoid suspicion, he was to advise killing her, but that, at midnight, he should come to the stable, whence they would escape together. So it was done, and after many days' travelling they arrived at a great city. "Now," said the mare, "I will put you in the way of making your fortune, but it will be necessary that, until I give you leave, you utter not a word excepting 'Bismé,' which shall serve as your name." She charged him also to hide always his beautiful golden hair by tying it up in a kerchief. She then sent him to the king's garden to seek work. The gardener took him, nor had reason to be sorry, for all that Bismé touched prospered beyond belief. In the garden stood the palace, where lived the king with his three daughters. It was Bismé's duty to carry them flowers, above all on their feast-days, and they declared that they had never seen such fine ones. When came the saint's day of the youngest her flowers were the best of all, and

she was much touched by their loveliness as well as by the beauty and modesty of Bismé, who seemed not even to dare to speak when addressed. The little mare now told him that he should go and dress his hair at midnight in a far corner of the garden, which, without his knowing it, was just under the princess's window. There he went, and untying the kerchief which bound his locks about his head, they fell in a golden shower over his shoulders. The princess, who had just come into her room, was dazzled by a strange brightness which lit it, and looking from the window to learn the cause she was startled to see that it was the golden hair of Bismé, who, all unconscious, was arranging it beneath her. The same thing happened on three nights, and the princess could no longer overcome the love for Bismé which had sprung up in her bosom. Her sisters had married princes of neighbouring countries, and a king had come to ask her hand of her father. In spite of her father's wishes, who told her she would never have another so fine an offer, she would not consent. Wondering at such strange behaviour, he asked her if she wanted to become a nun. For a long time she was sad and ailing, and the king, touched at the sight, offered to do anything to make her again happy. Having obtained his word, which kings may never break, she avowed her love for Bismé and her longing to marry him. "Be it so," said her father, "since I have given you my sacred word, but I can no longer treat you as my daughter; you must go with him to share the life of a poor gardener." She chose to follow the feelings of her heart, and became at once his wife and a peasant.

Very soon a war broke out, and her two brothers-in-law made ready to take part. A battle was about to be fought, and, in order to have as many men as possible, the king wished them to take Bismé. They mocked at him, asking what good such a lad could do; but they finally let him go. They gave him, however, such a wretched horse that he soon found himself fast in the mud of the road, whence his horse had not the strength to struggle out, and his brothers-in-law rode off laughing at him. No sooner were they out of sight than the little mare appeared beautifully harnessed, and with superb armour for Bismé, who, mounting her, quickly arrived on the field of battle. He

*Princess's love guided with heart of iron
 made his horse's - the horse's heart is
 the heart of iron - the horse's heart is*

there did wonders of bravery, and capturing more banners than he could carry he was forced to be content with the lances which surmounted them. He then rode home unrecognised, and having concealed his trophies put on again his poor garments. The enemy having been utterly defeated by his valour, the brothers-in-law gathered the banners he had left and carried them to the king as their own spoil. Then was set on foot a great banquet in honour of the victory, to find game for which the princes started for the chase. They took with them Bismé in the same scornful way, and soon he had the same ill-luck with his wretched hack. Again came up the little mare, bringing him a fine hunting dress with weapons, which he used with such success that he could scarcely carry all the game. Meeting without knowing him, the princes asked him to sell it. This he refused, but offered it them in exchange for their wedding rings. They accepted, resolving to buy others before returning, so that their wives should not know of it, and they carried the game home, pretending to have taken it themselves. The next day happened a similar adventure. Bismé was this time again beautifully equipped, though quite differently, and as before unrecognised. Now he demanded for his game that they should allow themselves to be branded with his seal on the rump. Strange to say they consented, believing it would never be known, and carried home the game with the same falsehood.

The day of the feast arrived. There was a throng of princes and knights, but among the servants stood Bismé and his poor wife, who was beginning to suffer sorely from grief and shame, in spite of her love for her husband. The two brothers-in-law bragged of their prowess in war and the chase, and showed proudly the banners, sneering the meanwhile at Bismé. The little mare at last gave him leave to speak, and he recounted all that had happened, showing as proof the lances and the wedding rings, and forcing his brothers-in-law to confess how he had branded them. The king, enraged at their perfidy, and, struck by the virtues of Bismé, banished them for ever from his kingdom, and, taking in their stead Bismé and his wife, named him his heir.

*This is not a representation of a long man
but a woman. The woman's name is Bismé.
The woman's name is Bismé. The woman's name is Bismé.*

THE GREAT BEAST.

A merchant, who had three daughters, being about to set forth on a long voyage, asked each of them what present she would like him to bring back for her. The eldest wished a bonnet, the second a gown, and the youngest only a rose. He went on his journey, and, his business done, he started on his way home. Passing one night through a wood he lost his way, and after wandering for a long while his horse became so jaded that he could go no farther. Seeing a garden hard by he went near, and found the gate wide open, but he could find no living being. He entered, and beheld within a beautiful palace. Having put his horse in the stable, which seemed to have been made ready for him, he then turned his steps towards the palace. It was open and entirely deserted, though a bed was ready made, and a splendid dinner set out. He began to dine and was deftly served by unseen hands. Immediately after eating, overcome by fatigue, he went at once to bed and soon fell soundly asleep until the morning, in spite of his uneasiness at his strange surroundings. When he had arisen his breakfast was given him, and his horse cared for in the same mysterious way. The morning being fine, he started early on his journey, and he crossed the garden without seeing a soul, and marvelling greatly at what had befallen him. Just before reaching the gate his eye was caught by the sight of a rose of singular beauty. Recalling his daughter's wish he picked it, when at once sprung up before him a dreadful monster, who, in great wrath, threatened him with death for having stolen the loveliest and rarest ornament of his garden. "I never dreamt I was doing so much harm," said the frightened merchant, and he recounted to him the wish of his daughter. The beast seemed interested, asked many questions about her, and at last said that though he had been robbed of what was most dear to him he would pardon him if the daughter was given to him. "Begone," said he, "but return within three days or you shall all die." The father felt forced to promise, but when he reached home he had not the heart to tell her the wretched lot that awaited her. Seeing him always sad she ques-

tioned him, and ended by knowing all ; and, as two days were already gone, and the palace far away, she unselfishly begged him to start at once. Hastening, with all speed, they reached the palace of the beast when but a few minutes were left of the third day, and found him in a pitiable state, half dead. They set to work to nurse him, and when he had rallied the merchant tore himself away from his daughter with sad forebodings. Two years passed, during which she lived in the palace, seeing the beast daily, when one day, after much urging, she besought the beast to give her leave to pay a short visit to her family, whom she had not since seen. " Remain but three days," said the beast, " or you will find me dead." She came back the third day, but by ill luck so late that she found the beast dying. So good had he been to her that she had become very fond of him, and she was overwhelmed with remorse at the evil she had unwillingly done him. She tended him lovingly, and, when he had come to himself, spoke tender words to him, promising never again to leave him, and even to become his wife. No sooner had she said this than the beast turned into a young and handsome prince ; for it was this promise that he had to await. They were married at once, and ever after lived happily together.

Beauty - never knew - second - brother - last - 1907

JOHN OF CALAIS.

A merchant, who had gained much wealth in trading voyages to foreign parts, had an only son. When the boy became of age his father told him that he must work, so he loaded a ship with goods and entrusted it to him. He charged him to look well after his money, which the son promised and departed. He sailed to a far country, where he quickly sold all at great gain. Walking one day he came upon the rotting corpse of a man lying on the ground by the roadside. His flesh was being eaten by the crows, and no one would bury him. He was filled with horror and pity at the sight. Asking the passers-by why he was so left, he was told that it was the body of a bankrupt, who, having died without leaving wherewith to pay his debts, it was the law and custom to throw his body on the high road to be eaten up

by the crows. He then begged to know whether there was no way of being allowed to bury him, for the young man had a good and tender heart. This his father knowing was the reason why he had so charged him to be careful lest he should part foolishly with his money. The neighbours answered that the only way was to pay the debts, which were very great. John at once agreed and paid all, so heavy a sum that he had nothing left. Then, having given the body a decent burial, he set sail and went home. His father on hearing of his coming made ready a great feast, and soon after they met asked if he had made a good sale. Yes, said the son, and he told him all. He was not at all pleased with what he thought the wastefulness of his son, but he ended by forgiving him this time. After a while he sent him on a second voyage, now charging him sternly to be more careful, and for greater safety he told the captain not to let him go on shore alone. He gave him still more precious goods, which the son took to another far city, and gained still greater profit than before. To make sure not to go back again with empty hands he at once set sail for home. He was almost there when he met a Moorish pirate ship, in which were two captive women, one of them young and very beautiful. His kind heart gave way, and wishing to ransom them they would take no less than their weight in gold. John of Calais at once paid it, though it left him without a penny. Having brought them on his ship he asked them their names. "I cannot tell you mine," said the younger, "but my companion is named Isabel, and she is my governess." The ship soon reached home and he was met with a loving welcome until his father learned that he brought back nothing but two women. He flew into a great rage, saying, "You have nearly ruined me, and I will do no more for you but give you a cottage, a small bit of land, and a thousand francs ; manage as you can ; I wish never to see you again."

John took to his new home the two women, and at once married the younger. He worked hard, and after a while laid up enough money to buy a small ship, with which he made short voyages. His wife showed herself well brought up and skilful in every way. She was a good artist, and one day she gave him a life-like portrait in silk of herself, him, and their child, which she bade him fasten before the

prow of his ship. He was then making ready for a voyage to Portugal, and without saying why she told him he was to drag his ship on shore by the prow.* Having arrived, he did so, and he was soon surprised to see a crowd about his ship. They looked keenly at the picture, and said to one another, "It is she; certainly she." An officer of the court came up and asked him to follow him. They went together, and John to his great astonishment was brought before the king. He was asked who were the persons in the picture, and was made to tell how he had found his wife, for it seemed she was the daughter of the king, who had had no tidings of her since she was captured. The king, overjoyed that she was still alive, got ready a fleet of ships to bring her home, and bade John lead the ships to his town. In them went many lords and ladies of the court, among whom one who was betrothed to the princess when she was made prisoner. John's father, hearing of the fleet's coming and all that had happened, was alarmed, and hurried to bring from her cottage the princess and governess, hoping to hide from the king their hard treatment. The princess at once set sail for home, and on the voyage she soon saw that her old lover still hoped to marry her after putting her husband out of the way by foul play. He tried to talk to her of love, but she drove him away, forbidding him to come near her. He then began to plot against John. The princess, mistrusting him, besought her husband never to leave her on the voyage, urged him to let himself be tied to her by the leg with a little golden chain. But one day he heard them cry that a great fish was to be seen, and they begged him as a skilful fisher to come and help catch it. He ran eagerly, without thinking, and in the bustle a way was found to make him fall overboard as if by chance. The ship went on without trying to save him, for the princess knew nothing until too late. Happily for him, a little boat came by, and the man in it took him in. They landed on a wretched desert island where they barely lived on the fish they caught. But they shared everything fairly, and lived there together a long time. John was sad with such a life, but his companion gave him no hope of a change. However, at last he said

* This is done at many ports on the Riviera.

that he would take him to his family if he would bind himself to give him the half of what he held most dear whenever he should ask him. John did so, and soon found himself in Portugal. He had greatly changed, his body wasted, his beard overgrown, and his clothes in rags, so that few would know him. One day, being in a city which seemed strange to him, he came to a palace where a feast was being made ready. Men were going up and down the staircase, laden with wood and water. Said he to himself, "Perhaps I may do the same, and thus gain something to eat." Soon he was asked to help, and he went to work. While passing through an ante-room he met a lady, who looked sharply at him, and followed him. After having well studied him she said to herself, "I am sure it is he," and ran to tell her mistress the news. For he had come into the king's palace unawares, having been there but once before, and that only for a moment, and this lady was the governess. The princess had him brought to her rooms, where with the greatest joy they at once knew one another. It was, however, needful awhile to hide him. Unluckily, this feast was on account of her wedding, for all believed her husband drowned, and after waiting a suitable time the king wished her to wed again in spite of her unhappiness at the thought. Hoping still that John was alive, and yet feeling helpless against her father's will, she sought to gain time, and succeeded in putting off the wedding for a year and a day. This had passed, and her betrothed claimed her hand. Now she feigned to be ill in order to delay, while she and the governess bettered John's sad state so that he would be known. From him she first learned how he had been the victim of a shameful crime, and she now set her heart on punishing the wretch as he deserved. She at last hit upon a plan. To avoid mistrust she allowed the wedding to be made ready. The king had commanded a show of fireworks, and this gave her the chance she sought. She asked her betrothed from love of her to light one piece, which had been privately so made that he was hurled into the air as if by chance, and so ended his days. Soon John's return was made known, and the king, having been told of all, welcomed him as his son, causing the feast to be given in his honour. All were making merry, the princess and

he were in a heaven of joy, when a mysterious stranger appeared. Asking to speak with John on pressing business, the servants at first refused to let him in at such a time, but he urged so hard that John, being told, agreed to see him. Having been brought into the room where all the family were, he found that it was the man who had saved his life when he was thrown into the sea, and who had now come to claim the fulfilment of his hard bargain. His dismay was dreadful, but being a man of his word he at once showed him his son as his dearest possession, and drawing his sword was about to cut him in twain when the unknown staid his hand, saying, "I loose you from your vow, for I am he whose body you piously buried when it had been thrown on the high road, and was being picked to pieces by the crows."

J. B. ANDREWS.

[Reprinted from THE FOLK-LORE RECORD, Vol. iii.]

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